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THE AGE OF VOLTAIRE.

The eighteenth century is the age of Voltaire in a sense and to a degree that is unparalleled in European literary history. Even Goethe, who has also his "century," is less typical, his sway less undisputed, and his excellence, though greater, less diversified. For it is the peculiar distinction of Voltaire that there is no department of letters in which he does not hold a prominent place, while in most he stands by common consent at the head.

Voltaire is not the author of the best lyrics of the century, but he comes just short of the highest place, being indeed all that a versifier can be who lacks what Horace calls the "divine breath" of poetry. His satires are the keenest, his tales in verse the wittiest, in the language. He is the author of the most correct serious epic and of the wittiest comic epic of his time. He is incomparably its best novelist and its best dramatist. His essays in physics are said to be creditable, and though he was neither a metaphysician nor a theologian, his works on ethics and theology are, and were, more read and prized than those of any of his philosophical or clerical contemporaries. He was far the best literary critic of his time, and its most popular historian. Besides this, he is the author of an infinite number of miscellaneous pamphlets and of a correspondence of appalling volume, almost all of which is interesting at least for its polished form. To whatever field of literature we turn, we shall find his mark set up in it. It is not until toward the close of the century that Rousseau, in the ethical and politi-

cal field, rivals, and for a time overshadows, the philosopher of Ferney. Voltaire will introduce us to the century and accompany us through it. Rousseau will furnish its natural epilogue.

Voltaire, whose real name of Arouet is seldom given him, (1694-1778), was the son of a wealthy and rather distinguished Parisian notary, but his early training was at the hands of his skeptical and scholarly god-father, the Abbé de Chateauneuf, and in 1704 he passed into the molding hands of the Jesuits, who seem to have given him a better education than in later controversial years he liked to admit. He still saw much of the Abbé, and was far from cloistered. Indeed, during the first year of his school life he so won the attention and interest of his god-father's friend, the famous Ninon de l'Enclos, that she bequeathed him 2,000 livres, "to buy books," she said.

He left school in 1711 and pretended to study law, but all his ambitions were clearly literary, and he was already a member of the noted literary circle, "du Temple." His father, dissatisfied with such vagaries, sent him first to Caen then to the Hague, where he got entangled with a young protestant lady to the yet more intense disgust of his parent, who actually obtained a *lettre de cachet* from the King authorizing his son's confinement. But he made no use of it, for Voltaire, always cautious in his daring, returned to Paris and the law, and occupied his mischievous energy in writing libellous poems, until the perplexed father had to send him away once more. It was not till 1715 that he returned to the laxer society of the Regency and to his literary circle, whom he presently charmed by his first play "Œdipe." But his itching fingers, under the provoking inspiration of the ambitious Duchess of Maine, were soon writing epigrams on the Regent himself that invited and justified a brief exile (1716), followed by confinement for ten months in the Bastille and a second short banishment from the capital. Yet, though the witty Orleans did not trust Voltaire, he enjoyed him, and late in 1718 the poet was able

to produce "Œdipe" with success at Paris, whence political squibs soon drove him for the fourth time, though the good-humored Regent shortly after gave him a pension, and seems to have employed him in the secret diplomatic service from 1722 to 1725. His social position was already assured by the death of his father, which left him a respectable competency, and he occupied himself during these years as a literary dilettante with an epic, "La Henriade," and a second tragedy, "Mariamne." But in 1725 a quarrel with the Chevalier de Rohan led him to a semi-voluntary exile to England, an event of such importance to his development that it forms, like Goethe's visit to Italy, the turning point in his intellectual life.

For in England Voltaire got first of all a very considerable sum of money which he employed so well in fortunate speculations and investments that his future life was always free from financial care, and, at the last, almost seigniorial. This made it possible for him to be more independent of patronage and favor than any literary man in France, and for much of the work he had before him such independence was necessary. Then, too, contact with English character and institutions could not but have a deep effect on so mobile a genius. The contrast between France and England, greater then than now, stimulated his mind to more serious thoughts on society and philosophy, and he returned to France, more capable, perhaps, than any other Frenchman of seeing the weak sides of her constitution and polity, and ready to offer opinions on them, which are often specious, though seldom profound. He made also a serious, though brief, effort to understand Shakspeare, and, even if he failed to apprehend him, he learned much from the English stage that affected his literary taste and that of the French public also, to whom he was first to introduce one destined to have the profoundest influence on the literature of later generations.¹

¹ See Pellissier: *La Litterature Contemporaine* p. 69, *Le Drame Shakespearien*.

After several tentative visits Voltaire returned to France in 1729, where he continued his dramatic activity with "Zaïre" (1732) and some inferior plays, wrote his "History of Charles XII.," and began his comic epic, "La Pucelle," the source of much amusement and of much deserved censure through many years of his life. But his restless spirit soon got him in hot water again with a volume of skeptical "Letters on the English," and with the "Temple of Taste," a satire on the poetasters of the time, accompanied by some remarks on Pascal, in which the orthodox scented danger and heresy. They had the book burned, but the author laughed at them from across the frontier in Lorraine.

Here, soon after, he settled for some years with Madame Chatelet, the "respectable Emily" of his correspondence, for his hostess, and it is probable that ties closer than Platonic bound them, though Voltaire's loves, like Jean Jacques', were always more cerebral than material, and Emily did not hesitate to supplement his affections by more commonplace attachments. He had now ample leisure as well as security, and here first he took up the serious profession of authorship. In 1735, with a cheerful self-confidence that was hardly justified, he produced a treatise on Metaphysics, less philosophical than controversial; in 1736 came a popular exposition of the Newtonian system and "Alzire," a drama of Peru; and this was followed by "Le Mondain," whose out-spoken optimism, if not essentially anti-christian, could hardly fail to seem so to the representatives of the French establishment.

The result was a long and bitter controversy, traces of which can be found in the allusions to the "Journal des Trevoux," to Fréron and Desfontaines, which abound in his epigrams and satires. To-day, however, the "Mondain" seems far less offensive in its language and tendency than "La Pucelle," from which he still continued to "snatch a fearful joy," reading it to friends whenever he got a chance, while he guarded it from publication with ostentatious anxiety. During all these years his pen was tireless. The

mass of minor work produced was enormous, and by 1741 he had completed "*Mérove*" and "*Mohamet*," dramas second only to "*Zaïre*."

Meantime, in 1740, he had met the philosophic king, Frederic of Prussia, whom he visited in 1743. Absence had now restored him to the graces of the Parisian court; in 1745 he was made royal historiographer, a post honored by the names of Racine and Boileau; and in 1746 he entered the Academy. But his literary indiscretions soon obliged him to leave these honors and French soil, still accompanied by the "respectable Emily," whose death at Luneville in 1749 left him a man of fifty-five, famous, rich, but without a home and without a country. It was natural under these conditions that he should lend a favorable ear to the invitation of Frederic to come to share, or as he would interpret it, to lead, the brilliant group of literary men which that great king had gathered at his court. So after two years of restless wandering and malicious activity that found its chief expression in satirical tales, he went to Berlin in 1751.

Voltaire's stay in Germany had more influence on the literary men of that country than it had on him. His quarrels and rupture with Frederic (1753) do not concern us. They were too great intellectually to get on well together, but too great also not to admire one another genuinely when apart. In his relations with the literati of Frederic's circle Voltaire appears in an unfavorable light, showing most strongly here, what he never failed to show elsewhere, vanity, spitefulness, financial unscrupulousness, a great desire to proclaim disagreeable and dangerous truths, and an equally earnest determination at all moral costs to avoid the consequences of so doing.

During his two years at Berlin, Voltaire finished his famous essay on the Reign of Louis XIV. and his fiercest literary lampoon, the "*Diatribes du Docteur Akakia*," an insult to his fellow-guest, Maupertuis, which resulted in the severing of their relations and closed Prussia to him as France was already closed. His "*Essai sur les Mœurs*"

now appeared and made his position even more difficult, so it was natural that after some travels he should turn to Switzerland, then, in spite of some provincial narrowness, a noble refuge of free-thought. Here he could lead an independent life, and here, in or near Geneva, he made his "home," the first he had ever had, from 1754 till his death, nearly a quarter of a century later. At first he lived in the suburbs of Geneva, but he soon bought a large estate at Ferney, just across the French frontier, and acquired various houses of refuge in Savoy, at Lausanne, and in other jurisdictions. He administered his large estate with patriarchal shrewdness, practised the most open hospitality, and permitted himself the luxury of a private theatre, as George Sand did later at Nohant, and also of a church, for which he obtained a relic from the Pope. He dedicated it "To God from Voltaire," *Deo erexit Voltaire*, and ostentatiously communicated there, much to the vexation of his bishop. He made Ferney, what Weimar became a half century later, the Mecca of literary Europe. All flocked to do him homage: few had the temerity to oppose his dicta. His influence, both in literature and ethics, was felt over all the continent, and maintained by epigrams in meteoric showers, and by letters that made the circuit of the literary world.

The most enduring works of this period are, first of all, "Candide," a prose tale directed against the received orthodoxy rather than against anything distinctively christian, and for irony perhaps unsurpassed in modern times; then the "Commentary on Corneille," generously undertaken to relieve the necessities of that dramatist's niece; but perhaps most of all the pamphlets written in defense of liberty of thought and against the tyranny of persecution, as it was even then being illustrated in France in the cases of Calas, of Sirven, of Espinasse, and others. That these men were mostly Protestants was natural, for only Catholics had the power to stifle thought, though the Huguenots might share the desire. The creed for which they suffered contributed nothing to the interest he felt in their wrongs. In-

deed he had not a whit more sympathy with the infallible Bible than with the infallible Pope, and, like Erasmus, he had no wish to break with authority on a matter so uncertain, so incapable of proof, and to him so unimportant as orthodoxy, if he could but secure toleration. His often repeated exhortation, "*Ecrasez l'infame*," does not allude, as some have vainly supposed, to the Church, still less to the Christ, but to bigoted intolerance based on ignorance and self-seeking, such as he thought he found exemplified in the Jesuits of his time and their helpers, Fréron and Palissot.

Many years were passed at Ferney in dignified ease, and Voltaire was a frail old man of eighty-four when the triumphs of Beaumarchais' "*Barber of Seville*" roused his vanity for a journey to Paris to witness the first performance of his own just completed "*Irène*," which was to be an unequalled ovation for its laurel-crowned author, and one of the three or four great days of French theatrical history. Soon after, at a solemn seance of the Academy, he embraced Franklin in true sentimental style. He even began another tragedy, but the old man had over-estimated the power of his body to follow his tireless mind. Presently came a collapse of physical strength so rapid that when the hour arrived when all Catholics desire the last sacraments, he had no longer sufficient self-control to maintain the solemn farce of a life time. He motioned the priest away, with a weak sincerity that would surely have cast a gloom over his last moments had it been granted him to recover a consciousness of his inconsistency. Dying thus, it was necessary to inter him in haste before the episcopal inhibition should intervene to exclude him from consecrated ground. In 1791 the remains were taken to the Pantheon, but the sarcophagus, when opened in 1864, was found empty, the mocker mocking even from the grave.

We have now to consider the work of Voltaire, and with it the work of his lesser contemporaries in the various fields of his multifarious activity.

In lyric poetry, the first place during the earlier half of the century belongs undoubtedly to Jean Baptiste Rousseau (1670-1741), who, like Voltaire, was associated with the coterie "du Temple," and like him was in constant trouble because he could bridle neither his tongue nor his pen. He, too, was exiled in 1712 and passed the rest of his life at Brussels, continuing more industrious to make enemies than others to get friends. His poetic work is not large. It consists mainly of panegyric or sacred odes, apparently studied from Boileau, and of licentious or cynical epigrams, which show the greater talent of the two, and passed with the classical critics for an imitation of Marot's "élégant badinage," as the odes did of his "Psalms." But J. B. Rousseau was neither a great man nor a great poet, and to say that he was the best of his time may excuse from speaking of his fellows.

A generation later than Rousseau is Piron (1689-1773), probably after Voltaire the most brilliant epigrammatist of France, but too witty to be on good terms with his fellow wits and too incapable, as his dramas showed, of any sustained effort, though many of the best lines of his sparkling comedy, "*La Métromanie*," have passed into the small change of cultured conversation. Another writer of light verse is Gresset, a "one-poem poet." His "*Vert-Vert*," a parrot who passes from a monastery to a nunnery and picks up phrases far from monastic on the journey, is perhaps the best in its kind since *La Fontaine*, and shows a more kindly humor than the "*Contes*" of Voltaire or the work of his other contemporaries. Gresset, for the greater part of his life, was connected with a religious order, and he is one of the very few poets of this time who never pander to vice; but his character, though gentle, was weak, and the close of his life was wholly under the direction of those who thought the graceful badinage of "*Vert-Vert*" a matter for fasting and penance. Later fabulists, *Florian* (1755-1794), and *Marmontel* (1723-1799), preserved the traditions of the apologue but their work has only historic interest.

In the honied, amorous, or licentious verse of the "glow-worm" type, Voltaire was surpassed, and might well be content to be, by Gentil-Bernard (1710-1775), Dorat (1714-1789), and Parny (1753-1814), the last a Creole who brought at first some breath of fresh life into French verse, but later lost this facile touch, so that his longer poems have been judiciously pronounced "equally remarkable for blasphemy, obscenity, extravagance, and dulness." It must be allowed that if, in this century there is no verse that is extremely good, there is much that is extremely bad, and very little that is worse than these later poems of Parny. But the best in this kind are only triflers. Much later and a step higher are the anacreontic Desaugiers (1772-1827) and Rouget de Lisle, whose immortal "Marsellaise" is less characteristic than his convivial verses, which mark the true ancestor of Béranger. In the descriptive school of poetry this century pointed with pride to Delille, the French Thomson, whose insatiate thirst for paraphrase turns backgammon into "that noisy game where horn in hand the adroit player calculates an uncertain chance," while sugar masquerades as "the American honey which the African squeezes from the reedy juice." Poetry became a puzzle till the revolt of the Romanticists brought plain speaking and the *mot-propre* into fashion again, substituting virility for these elaborate conceits.

It need not be said that Voltaire had cultivated all these fields except the sacred canticle. He had written also the only serious epic of the century worthy to be named, though "La Henriade" is poor enough in its jejune correctness; and his "La Pucelle," with all its faults, is still the best comic epic of France. His versified "Contes," though malicious in their ethical bearing, are the wittiest and best told since La Fontaine, and his satires are hardly second to the best work of Régnier and Boileau. No man had so great a command of *vers de société* as he. He never rose to true poetry; that divine spark was denied him. He lacked the sincerity that springs from noble convictions. But he produced an enor-

mous mass of what has been justly called the "*ne plus ultra* of verse that is not poetry."

Yet the taste for a truer poetry was not dead in France. These years saw a revival of interest in the great sixteenth century poets; a collection of the old Fabliaux was reprinted, as well as the works of Marot, Villon, and Rabelais; all of which had its reward in the Romantic school of 1830. But it was reserved for the very close of the century to produce a true poet, and to guillotine him just as he had revealed his promise. André Chénier (1762-1794), Greek by birth, half Greek by parentage, wholly classical in tastes and studies, attained the aspirations of the "classicists." But, in spite of Chénier's genius, the more fully he realized his ambition, the more artificial he became, and so he had little influence in speeding or retarding the development of the Romantic school, which indeed was well advanced before the tardy publication of the greater and better part of his poems (1819).

In the regular tragedy Voltaire's supremacy was not questioned. Indeed what deserves mention outside his work does so almost wholly because it points to a revolt from traditions that he was anxious to maintain. Among his fifty pieces the comedies are less good than one would anticipate from the general character of his mind; even "Nanine," which he drew from Richardson's Pamela, is only the best among second class work. But if he never thoroughly mastered the technique of comedy, his best tragedies, some ten, approach more nearly to the correctness of Racine than any work of an age that had nothing to suggest the grandeur of Corneille, still less the profound psychology of Molière, and in the dexterous management of the tragic form he may have surpassed in "Mérope" and "Zaïre" either of his great predecessors. His idea was to perfect the tragedy of Racine, itself the most perfect in his view that the human mind had yet produced. This he hoped to attain by increasing the action and heightening the spectacular effect. But while he laid stress rightly on

these elements of interest, he found himself unconsciously carried away from Racine, toward the processes of Corneille, and even to the Shakspeare he rejected. Yet his reforms seem timid enough to-day, and at the time attracted little animadversion.

For a bolder note of revolt had been sounded by Lamotte's attack on the regular tragedy, challenging the authority of the unities and the prestige of the ancients, though in his own best drama, "*Inez de Castro*," Lamotte had lacked the courage of his convictions. He was, indeed, far in advance of his time, and the contemporary tragedians, Crébillon *père*, and his fellows, kissed the rod of tradition and of Voltaire, though Crébillon has occasional bursts of more Cornelian power than Voltaire ever attains. Late in the century the standard of revolt was again raised by Ducis, who adapted several plays of Shakspeare to French taste, between 1767 and 1792, and broke the way for greater successors.

But besides these revolts from regular tragedy a radical modification of it appeared during this century in the tragedy of common life, which, with a parallel breaking down of the regular comedy to the *Comédie Larmoyante*, confused the distinctions which had separated the tragedy and comedy of the classicists. The *Tragédie Bourgeoise* and the *Comédie Larmoyante* inevitably merged into the melodrama, or *drame*, fathered by La Chaussée¹ and ably advocated by Diderot. The essence of all this work is that the scenes shall be taken from contemporary life in its serious or serio-comic aspects. But though these beginnings of a very large and important section of the modern drama are of great historic interest, intrinsically they present little that is worthy to survive.

In comedy, Voltaire's best work was out-ranked both by his predecessor, Le Sage (1668-1747), and by his successor, Beaumarchais (1731-1798), while Destouches (1680-1754),

¹ See Lauson : La Chaussée.

Marivaux (1688-1763), and Sedaine (1719-1797), were his not unworthy compeers.

Le Sage, better known as the author of "Gil Blas," wrote also a multitude of short farces and operettas which stood in high repute, while his "Crispin" and "Tucaret" are true comedies, quite worthy of Molière. Both are prose studies of contemporary society, the former more lively than probable, but scintillating with wit and palpitating with comic life, the latter more seriously critical, a satire on the moneyed class that was already beginning to contest the social preëminence of the corrupted nobility, which in its turn received merited castigation, while provincial narrowness and mercantile pettiness were not spared, and the characters in both plays, as we should expect from his novels, were more completely rounded than the types of Molière.

But if Le Sage, at his best, leads the stage at the former half of the century, Destouches is not far behind and his work maintains a remarkable level of excellence, though he never deserts the typical method of Molière and Regnard. His "Philosophe Marié" and "Les Glorieux" have life in them still. Marivaux, however, was a man of more originality both for good and ill. His manner was sufficiently unique to furnish to the language the word *marivaudage*, which now stands for a rather effeminate wit and affectation of simplicity. But Marivaux was better than this word might imply. He was above all else a delicate psychologist, and his dramatic mission was the analysis of love, till then hardly attempted in comedy. In Molière the tender passion is assumed as a state, with Marivaux it is a development. His dramas begin with the dawn of love, and end usually with its declaration. They are trifles light as air, but delicious in their apparent naïveté and hidden depth. There is, indeed, little or no intrigue, and so there is danger of monotony if his plays¹ be read consecutively, but it is a re-

¹ The best are: "Le Legs," "Double Inconstance," "Jeu d'Amour et du Hazard." See Larroumet: Marivaux, and Faguet: XVII. Siècle.

lief to find the old theatrical apparatus and conventions laid aside with a light heart for stories that transport us to a delicate and amiable fairyland, where we recognize ourselves as we should like to be. But, though the idea of the development of love as a subject for comedy was a most fruitful seed, and all his successors profited by it according to their power, Marivaux founded no school, for as the century proceeded, the dramatic current was deflected by the stronger philosophical bent. The desire to sway the feelings and to preach a shallow, sentimental optimism takes possession of the stage under the banner of naturalism and the *Tragédie Bourgeoise*, though in the main these dramas with a purpose deserve no individual notice.

This change is often attributed to Diderot, but the reflected lustre of his achievements in literature and philosophy has probably made men attribute to him dramatic services that belong to his predecessors, notably to Lamotte and Destouches.¹ His plays, "Le Fils Naturel" and "Le Père de Famille" were unfortunate illustrations of excellent theories, derived in part from the German Lessing whom in turn they inspired; but there was nothing new in his ideas, nothing that had not been anticipated for the "Comédie Larmoyante" by La Chaussée (1692-1754), while in tragedy Lamotte had demanded prose and more action as early as 1721, frankly setting up the English standard for imitation. But if Diderot was neither first to preach nor to practice either the bourgeois tragedy or melodrama, neither was he the most eloquent proclaimer of the new doctrine, for that leaf must be added to the dubious laurels of Rousseau. Indeed, his original theory that the drama should present conditions rather than characters, "that the profession should become the principal object and the character only accessory," was rather retrogressive in its tendency, though happily it remained without effect.

¹ See Ducros: Diderot, Paris, 1894; Reinach, Diderot, Paris, 1894; and a notice of these books by Lemaître in *Journal des Débats* (Hebd.) 4th and 11th August, 1894.

More truly and less obtrusively philosophic than the men of whom we have just spoken is Beaumarchais,¹ the most important dramatic figure in the latter part of the century, though he was the author of but two really successful plays. Beaumarchais had seen more of social life than any of his predecessors, for, though the son of a watch-maker, he had ingratiated himself by skill and good fortune in court circles, where he made a wealthy marriage and influential connections in the banking class, while his "Memoirs" by their scathing exposure of the corruption of an unpopular Parlement made him popular also with the influential bourgeoisie. A visit to England, undertaken in the government interest, had much influence on the relations of France to the North American colonies then about to revolt from England, and its literary effect on Beaumarchais was almost as determining as it had been for Voltaire, for it needed only that to his knowledge of society and the recklessness characteristic at once of the spirit of the time and of his own, there should be added the art of English comedy to inspire his native wit with the epoch-making "Barber of Seville" (1775) and the "Marriage of Figaro" (1784). Barber Figaro, the hero of both plays, is a light-hearted, versatile, shrewd scape-grace, with a good deal of that worldly philosophy which was assisting in the disintegration of society and preparing that Revolution which these comedies, by their levelling tendencies, did much to provoke and to hasten, though Beaumarchais had probably no more serious purpose than delight in his own wit. He wished to fire a squib and exploded the magazine.²

These comedies mark a decided advance in the development of dialogue which becomes more precise, epigrammatic, and clear cut. Beaumarchais' sparkling verve is sustained in a way till then approached only by Mo-

¹ See Lintilhac: Beaumarchais.

² Modern types of "Figaro" are to be found in Augier's "Les Effrontés" and "Le Fils de Giboyer." The political satire finds a more serious parallel in Sardou's "Ragabas."

lière, and hardly attained even by him. Indeed, it will often seem that the author is too prodigal, or that his hearers were men of quicker wits than ours, for we hardly conceive that such keenness and brilliancy should be fully valued at one reading, still less when heard but once on the stage. If it were not a paradox, one would be inclined to say that the chief fault of Beaumarchais is the monotony of his scintillating brilliancy. But, besides this, in construction and the management of intrigue, the plays touched the high water mark of the century. They earned an unparalleled success, and left a tradition that after four decades of woeful mediocrity was revived by Hugo and Dumas, and inspired the operas of Mozart and Rosini.

This intervening mediocrity was due in great measure to the engrossing interest of politics. From 1789 till the end of the century plays were more often praised and damned for their sentiments than for their merits. The history of the stage during these years is of great interest, but it belongs no longer to the history of literature.¹ Yet the drama of the century as a whole, though in no sense great, was at least superior to its poetry and showed surer signs of the Romantic awakening.

During this whole period prose had been encroaching on the domain of dramatic poetry, and after its close the Alexandrine enjoyed only an asthmatic revival. It is in this century that prose becomes the natural vehicle of almost every phase of thought and feeling, occupying a far more varied, vast, and important field than ever before, and for the first time surpassing verse in literary value. This is preëminently the century of the "philosophers," the age of scientific inquiry and of comparative study of history and institutions. And though it is true that none of these fields belongs to pure literature, many of these works show such intrinsic beauty, and had such influence on imaginative prose that no literary study can ignore them.

¹ See Lumière: *Le Théâtre Français pendant la Revolution*, and Welschinger: *Le Théâtre de la Revolution*.

The first of the historians of this century belongs rather to the preceding. St. Simon's (1678-1755) "Memoirs" show the unreconciled feudal noble, while his treatment of language is as autocratic as though Balzac and Vaugelas had lived in vain. As a contemporary said: "St. Simon saw the nation in the nobility, the nobility in the peerage, and the peerage in himself." These "Memoirs," often amusing, sometimes exasperating, are always valuable for the history of their time, but they are not characteristic of its literary or intellectual movement. In Rollin (1661-1741), on the other hand, the literary instinct wholly predominated. Entirely engrossed in making himself clear and his subject interesting, he does not rise above the amiable raconteur. This would apply also to Voltaire's "Charles XII." and "Peter the Great," but in his "Essai sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations," he shows, and is first to show, a genuine effort to study the development of civilization under the varying conditions of character and destiny, and thus, though he could not emancipate himself from the passions of his time nor observe without prejudice, though the age of Louis XIV. was to him "the most glorious epoch of the human mind," and the story of Charles Martel and Roland "deserved no more to be written than that of bears and wolves," yet he inaugurated the science of comparative history.

In this field he was almost immediately followed by Montesquieu, a far more catholic spirit, and without a trace of the iconoclastic optimism so general in his time. Already in 1621 his "Lettres Persanes" had shown him a keen critic of contemporary society, its foibles, its government, and its creed. A more serious and truly philosophic mind appeared in his "Grandeur and Decadence of the Romans" (1734), and this was but a foretaste of the great "Spirit of Laws" (1748), where the relations of law to government, manners, climate, religion, and trade, were discussed with a sweep of vision that embraced every age and country. In it all, however, Montesquieu was much more a student than

a reformer, more eager to see how what is came to be than to think how he can make it better. But though he was not himself a revolutionist nor excited to change, his book, by calling attention to the superiority of the English constitution, had an immense and enduring influence in determining the destinies of France and of the whole Continent, which has come more and more to the constitutionalism of which he was the greatest herald.

Another historian who left a far different impress on the time was Malby (1709-1785), whose persistent exaltation of a false classicism took a hold on the popular fancy that explains much of the masquerading of the early revolutionary period. More directly political in its tone was Raynal's "*Histoire Philosophique des Indes*," a coöperative work, that pretends to be a colonial history and is really a demagogic declamation, of which a single example may suffice. "Cowardly people, imbecile herd," says the historian, "You are content to groan when you should roar." What must the philosophic princes have thought of this, the Austrian Joseph, the Czarina Catherine, and King Frederic, who had trusted the charmer of Ferney when he said that "the cause of the philosophers was the cause of the princes?" They might see now that the attack on the church inevitably reacted on the divine right of royalty, and that history was only a pulpit for the "philosophers."

Never have self-styled "philosophers" exercised so direct an influence on society as in France at this time. Among them Voltaire holds the chief and central place, but the radical group to his left is more witty, keen, vigorous and loud than the conservatives who make but a poor and timid show in defence of inherited faith. This new philosophy drew its inspiration from England, chiefly from Locke, and like him, the French metaphysicians aimed rather to be clear than profound, gliding over difficulties and aspiring to systematic completeness at the cost sometimes of common-sense. Voltaire almost boasts of his superficiality. "Throw my work into the fire," he exclaims, "if it is not as clear

as a fable of La Fontaine." Or again, "The French have no idea how much trouble I take to give them no trouble." But he was seldom anxious to push his thought to its legitimate conclusion. He used it as a solvent of old, incrustated prejudices, not as a rule of new life. He remained a deist, and showed more than once that his faith was real and not conventional. This antithesis between his philosophy and his faith bore good fruit. It made him the eloquent and successful preacher of toleration.

His successors were more consistent. Condillac forced sensationalism to a dizzy brink where Diderot and La Mettrie nursed their pure materialism. And from this verge Helvétius and d'Holbach soon took the step that landed them in a cynical atheism which provoked a protest even from Frederic and Voltaire. But they could not banish the spirit they had conjured, a ruthless iconoclasm that found its fullest representative in the "Encyclopédie," the joint production of Diderot, d'Alembert, and most of the radical thinkers of the time. The reception given to their work amply testifies that these men were in accord with the people. The 4500 copies of its twenty-eight folio volumes were hardly dry before they were sold, and the last set brought the price of rarity. Voltaire's contributions are collected in his "Dictionnaire Philosophique," a work full of personalities and of mocking irreverence which he seemed to think justified by the nature of his adversaries and of their cause. Yet the book is one of the most characteristic and typical of his whole "hundred volumes," and is still readable in spite of its alphabetical arrangement. Its value, however, is literary and not philosophical, at least in any sense that we now attach to that word.

To eighteenth century France a "philosopher" is a man disabused of all "the long results of time," a man who looks at life with shrewd but shallow common-sense. And until it was weighed this specious optimism was naturally of immense popularity. Indeed the philosophers could truly say that the world was gone after them. The mania for

collections, the dilettante study of "natural history," date from this time. Hundreds busied themselves thus with physics and chemistry, and it was especially for them that Voltaire had popularized Newton's theories in his "English Letters." In their optimistic hopefulness the puzzle of nature seemed almost solved. Like Wagner in Goethe's "Faust," they felt they knew much and hoped to know all, an attitude indicated by the inscription on Buffon's statue at Versailles: "A genius equal to the majesty of nature." Indeed, as they approach the maelstrom of the Revolution a vertigo seems to seize on these minds cut loose from the moorings of faith and drifting into unknown seas. "Enlightenment is so diffused," says Voltaire with his genial optimism, "that there must be an outburst on the first occasion. . . . Our young men are fortunate. They will see fine things." Rousseau had a truer and profounder foresight: "Rely not," he says in "Emile," "on the existing social order, forgetting that this order is subject to inevitable revolutions, and that you cannot foresee nor prevent what may come on your children. The great will become small, the rich poor, the monarch subject. We approach the critical state and the age of revolutions."

Rousseau, not Voltaire, is the seer of the closing century, and he has put this startling prophecy, not in an historical or philosophical treatise, but in a novel, "Emile," which, with his "Nouvelle Héloïse," exercised a more fateful influence on mankind than any works of pure imagination that literary history knows. So we are brought back from a philosophical digression to pure literature, to the novelists and critics of the eighteenth century. Criticism may, indeed, be briefly dismissed. Voltaire is once more easily first with his "Commentary on Corneille," but Diderot's annual "Salons" were epoch-making for the rational study of art, while his dramatic essays popularized a naturalism that they did not originate, and the "Correspondence" of his friend Grimm with German courts may still be read with interest for its subjective originality. Only these three stand,

for La Harpe, in spite of his contemporary popularity, is but the talented representative of a sterile conservatism.

In no department of literature was progress more varied or the outlook more hopeful than in prose fiction during this entire period. Le Sage shares with Voltaire the honors of the first rank, but excellent work was done by Prévost, La Clos, and Louvet, in the psychological novel; by Crébillon *fil*s and Restif de la Bretonne in the tale; by du Laurens, de la Metrie, and Diderot in the Shandyesque romance; while Marivaux furnished delightfully amusing trifles, Florian and Marmontel didactic sugar pills, and the Abbé Barthélemy a huge bolus of the same tempting character in the six stout volumes of the "Travels of the Young Anacharsis." And then, with a place quite unique among the novelists of the world, is Rousseau, the prophet of the new era, of sentiment and nature.

Le Sage (1668-1747), though no mean dramatist, was greatest as a realistic and satirical novelist. Like Voltaire, he was a scholar of the Jesuits and educated for the law, but while Voltaire drew his inspiration from England, Le Sage turned rather to Spain. The title and idea of "Le Diable Boiteux," his first independent essay (1707), was borrowed from them, though the work itself, in Scott's opinion one of the profoundest studies of human character, was purely original. But he is less remembered to-day for this than for the equally keen and more entertaining "Gil Blas," a book singular in that it seems to belong rather to either of two foreign literatures than to its own. For while it was recognized as a masterpiece in France, it had no roots in the past of French literature, and in form was so closely studied from the Spanish *novela picaresca* that over-zealous Castilians have actually claimed it as a translation. And as it had no ancestry in France, so it had no immediate posterity there, but rather in England in the work of Defoe and Smollett, though Le Sage anticipated many features of the novel of low life and the naturalism of the school of Balzac.

In his style Le Sage set himself against what he called the "strained diction" and "charms more brilliant than solid" of Marivaux. He wished to be clear, and above all not to be affected, and he molded to his use a language very direct, terse, and truly popular. If "*Gil Blas*," as a novel, seems at times prolix, it is because Le Sage, like a novelistic La Bruyère, is not content to show a segment of society, but seeks in the varying fortunes of his hero to reveal all its faults and foibles. But he shuns the exceptional and deals with life, as he knows it, and with average men, differing thus from some modern realists, and from his own later work. For there is in this school always a tendency to dwell on the picturesque side of vagabond life, and to study the abnormal in vice rather than in virtue. Le Sage, indeed, has no touch of the pessimism that pervades the modern Naturalists. Acquaintance with vice is but a factor in bringing Gil to virtue. In "*Guzman d'Alfarache*" and the "*Bachelier de Salamanque*," however, there is hardly any expression of moral sympathy at all, a fact much more interesting than the novels themselves, for it is the first sign of that weariness of conscience and moral apathy that was presently to reveal itself in Voltaire's "*Pucelle*," in Diderot's "*Neveu de Rameau*," and in the work of the later philosophers. By this almost alone can Le Sage be connected with the fiction of his century in France.

For the growth of the novel was rather on psychological lines. Marivaux (1688-1763), without being either a realist or a moralist, showed in his "*Spectateur*" that he was a very keen analyst of human feeling, and the qualities of these essays appear also in his best novels, "*Marianne*" and "*Le Paysan Parvenu*." The former is a delicate dissection of coquetry, the latter traces the development of self-assurance and effrontery in M. Jacob, the successful and universal lover, who represents a sort of arrested development of Maupassant's *Bel-Ami*, though oftener compared with Molière's *Don Juan* and George Sand's *Leone Leoni*. It is this psychological study that alone interests Mari-

vaux. No writer kills off his characters with more non-chalance when they begin to embarrass him, but, even so, he has brought neither of these stories to an end. In him first we notice also the curious concomitance of a romantic and sublimated conventional sentimentality with facile shamelessness, a note that runs through all the fiction of the century, reaching its height in Rousseau; a double twisted thread that seldom fails to show itself both in the loftiest and in the basest writers.

This peculiar sentimental strain was taken up with much skill in Prévost's (1697-1763) "*Manon Lescaut*," admirable in a rather nauseating kind. One knows not whether to wonder most at the complacent love of the hero, who is ever ready to pardon venal infidelity, or at the deathless love of the frail heroine, who can resist all seductions but those of good wine and good clothes. As an analysis of sentimentalism degenerating to the verge of drivelling inanity, the book holds an eminence that may long be unrivalled.

"*Manon*" had no important successors in the early part of the century. Indeed, its closest counterpart in the intertwining of sentiment and lubricity, Louvet's "*Faublas*," dates from 1786. More closely resembling Marivaux, but without his depth, are the society stories, written for the amusement of an idle and corrupt aristocracy by Crébillon *fils*, son of the dramatist, and by the equally immoral but more delicate de la Clos, whose "*Liaisons Dangereuses*" is the best in this inferior kind. From amusement to instruction is not a long step, but the didactic fiction, though voluminous, is not of striking excellence. It may suffice to name the "gutter-Rousseau," Restif de la Bretonne, who is quite unrivalled in the serious pedagogy of his obscene sentimentality, and at the other extreme Bernardin de St. Pierre, in whose didactic idyls, "*Paul and Virginia*" and "*La Chaumière Indienne*," sentiment reaches the acute stage of hyper-æsthesia, and the ethics, like Shakspeare's medlars, are "rotten before they are ripe." Bernardin,

however, is the natural result of Rousseau's teaching, and that will claim attention presently.

Meantime, a new turn had been given to fiction by Voltaire, here, as usual, a leader. He is the true founder of the *tendenz-roman*, the novel with a social or ethical purpose. His short tales are the most artful and insinuating controversial pamphlets that were ever penned. Self-satisfied optimism in religion and popular thought were never so pitilessly laid bare, so wittily mocked, as in "Candide:" political and ecclesiastical reforms were never more effectually preached than in the "Homme aux Quarante Ecus," with its amusing persiflage of the "single tax;" the presumptuousness of an unspiritual established church might laugh at direct attacks but winced at the scornful masked satire of "Zadig." No man has done so much in a bad cause with so slight weapons as Voltaire by the indirect, gliding irony of his allusions to the Scriptures. "I will not moralize and will be read," said Byron, but Voltaire moralized more convincingly than any of his time and was more universally read also. It is true that here, as elsewhere, he is not consistent. Perhaps he was not anxious to be. "I begin to care more for happiness in life than a truth," he said. Intellectually, he might be a pessimist and determinist, but he knew that "the good of society demands that man shall think himself free," and he acted and preached accordingly, for instance in "Le Mondain" and "L'Histoire de Jenni." In this he is more a utilitarian than a philosopher. He knows that the mass of readers will not see his inconsistency while they will feel his keen thrusts at old abuses and creeds, and their pride will be flattered by the frank cynicism which urges them to combine with the writer to draw advantage from the superstitions of the less enlightened. Perhaps no "moralist" is at once so clear and so self-contradictory as Voltaire in these tales, where he seems now deist, now atheist, now radical, now reactionary, now pessimist, now optimist, so that the work as a whole becomes indeed "a chaos of luminous ideas."

The novel with a purpose, thus launched, found an eager advocate in Diderot, more consistent in design, but less even in execution, rising sometimes to a serious and eloquent indignation as in "*La Religieuse*," then descending into the pig-sty of "*Les Bijoux Indiscrets*," or loosing the bridle of a Shandyesque fancy in "*Jacques le Fataliste*" and the "*Neveu de Rameau*," that so fascinated the attention of Goethe; or perhaps revelling in the free-lovers' utopia of the "*Supplement au Voyage de Bourgainville*." As a French critic, Faguet, has observed, Diderot was a type of the French bourgeois, and very far from "the most German head in France," as it has been the fashion to call him.¹ He had the same facile morality, the same lack of delicacy, the same vulgar inclinations and generous emotions, the same sincerity and industry, that stamp the French middle class which was now first coming to the front as representative of national life. It is in his novels that Diderot shows most of this fundamentally Gallic mind. While his philosophy was a prelude to the theory of evolution, in his fiction he anticipated Rousseau's "state of nature," and his cynicism did not shrink from the uttermost consequences of his theory, more consistent in this than his sentimental successor, who had arrived at similar conclusions by an independent and less logical process. Yet the "state of nature" is more associated with Rousseau than with Diderot, for he preached it with a fire of sympathetic enthusiasm that made him teacher and guide of Europe for many years in a deeper sense than Voltaire had ever been, though literary criticism must rank him as the inferior genius.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), was the son of a Genevan clock-maker, yet up to his fortieth year he had no settled home or occupation, but led the wandering life of a sentimental *Gil Blas*, the shuttlecock of his usually generous emotions. For he had a good heart, ready to open to all, but as ready to take offense, and quick to think itself de-

¹ The expression is Ste. Beuve's. Goethe had said: "In all that the French blame in him, he is a genuine German."

ceived. No man ever quarrelled so consistently with every one who tried to befriend him, with Voltaire, Diderot, Hume, the Prince of Conti, and the various lady patronesses of his wanderings. He came at last to a hatred, not of the individual, but of society, which, it seemed to him, had corrupted the individual and made him unworthy of the loving trust Rousseau longed to give. It is not the faults of human nature that grieve him, but the faults of social order against which his sensitive nature chafes. So his life becomes a vision of what might be; a utopian imagination colors all his philosophy. It addresses itself not to reason but to sentiment. It is not the white light of ideas, but the glow of passionate fires. Evidence is neglected, probability scorned. The "Social Contract" assumes an origin of society that not only never was, but, *a priori*, never could be. The pedagogy of "Emile," though most valuable and suggestive, is just as impracticable and visionary. The "Nouvelle Héloïse" moves in a cloud-land of emasculate unreality, while the cynical frankness of his "Confessions" shows how his character was disintegrated by unresisted imagination, and explains his "misanthropic optimism" by his pathological condition.

Dissatisfaction with the order of society was almost universal during the latter half the century, but, except in philosophic circles, it was inarticulate and dimly realized. Rousseau made it a popular passion, a universal enthusiasm. But the destructive influence of "Inégalité" (1755) far outweighed the constructive effort of the "Contract Social" (1762), which offered no practical remedy and, indeed, stands quite isolated in his writings, for it is inconsistent with that fundamental dogma of the "state of nature" which runs through all his later work, inspiring his "Lettre sur les Spectacles" (1758) with the spirit of a modern Tertullian, and dictating the aristocratic pedagogy of "Emile" (1764).

Rousseau's theory in "Emile" is that a child should be left to develop naturally. He allows a tutor, but only to satisfy legitimate curiosity and arrange external influence so as

to give "a positive indirect education." Even the ethics of property are to be taught by object lessons. He wishes the intellect subordinated to the sentimental affections and emotions, but he wishes the child to be isolated from other children, from adults, even from his family, since all these have some of the inherited virus of society. Goethe called "Emile" the "natural gospel of education," and in so far as the object of all teaching is to produce independent thinking, to teach children and not facts, Rousseau proclaimed a truth always in danger of being forgotten. He was the reforming iconoclast in this field that Voltaire and Diderot were in others. He went too far. Taken literally, his "intuitive education" was a paradox, but it was a most helpful one, most timely, and most fruitful, not in France alone, but for all Europe.

In the letters of "Julie," the "Nouvelle Héloïse," a novel suggesting Goethe's "Elective Affinities," we have Rousseau's ideas on love, and naturally therefore his most popular work, perhaps the most influential novel that was ever written. Here he put most heart and passion, and most of his morbid personal experience. It is true that the situation he creates is hopelessly artificial. These connoisseurs of rare sentiments and mutual students of their own pathological psychology, these romantic self-tormentors are so false to nature that Rousseau can neither procure a normal climax nor suffer his characters to get on without one, but is compelled to summon a *deus ex machina* to cut the tangle in which their perverse sentimentality had involved these paradoxical people in their "enterprise against common sense." That there were such men as St. Preux in this generation, no one with Werther before his eyes will deny, but it was the women of the novel, Julie and Claire, that won the book its most passionate admirers and its immense vogue among ladies who felt that their duplex feminine nature, neglected by previous novelists, had been seized as never before. They were flattered by the eminence to which Rousseau had advanced them, and charmed

by the sympathy that throbbed through his pages. They know the reality of the *âcre baiser* that so amused Voltaire. Indeed, Rousseau's women had a more defined individuality than French fiction had yet seen. In general, the book was genuine and sincere. It came from a romantic heart, and spoke to thousands of romantic hearts, who also had in rich measure the "gift of tears," in which Julie so readily dissolved. It roused in them that "general warmth" of which Jean Paul speaks, that vague, general, ill-defined sentimental philanthropy, which was a cause, and, still more, a directing force in the French Revolution.

"Emile" and "Julie" show sentimentality applied. The "Confessions" exhibit it as raw material. Here one is less repelled by the dogmatic under-current and so can enjoy more fully the artistic charm of this apparently frank and simple narrative of his frailty and his vices, where with great art attention is suspended, events skilfully prepared, each climax most carefully managed. These "Confessions" are probably most read to-day, but in the influence they exerted they must yield both to the novels and to "The Savoyard Vicar," a little tractate contained in "Emile," whose emotional, undogmatic, yet fervent faith is the first effectual stemming of the infidel current and the herald of the equally emotional christianity of St. Pierre, Chateaubriand, and Lamartine.

Finally, in all Rousseau's works there is a love for nature, a sense of and appreciation for natural beauty, that was a revelation in French literature. Not only is there nothing before Rousseau equal to the sunrise in the third book of "Emile," or to his description of the *pervenche*, but there is nothing to which it can be compared. He gave his countrymen a new sense. This is his greatest title to literary immortality. But he was great also as a describer of sentiments and feelings, surpassing in this Prévost as he had surpassed Marivaux. Now this, as Saintsbury has said, is just the line of demarcation that separates the old literature from the new. Sentimental religion and sentimental poli-

tics may be discredited by the logic of events, the recent literary movement may show in its naturalism more of the spirit of Diderot, but descriptions of sentiment and nature and the mutual play of one on the other are still the key-note of modern literature. That Rousseau struck that note gives him a unique place, and makes his name the most fitting introduction to the literature of the present century.

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